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Bachelor of Science, Food and Resource Economics, 1991, University of
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Master of Science, Agricultural Economics, 1994, Kansas State University,
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Doctor of Philosophy, Agricultural Economics, 1995, Kansas State
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Assistant/Associate Professor, Department of Agricultural Economics,
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I am very pleased to have this opportunity to thank the USDA and CSREES for their support of the USDA's National Needs Fellowship (NNF) program. The impact this program has had on my own career has been profound. Upon completing my bachelor's degree in Food and Resource Economics at the University of Florida (UF) in 1991, I was unsure about my next career step. Coming from an academic family (my father was a professor of psychology), I had an idea that I wanted to pursue graduate studies, but felt obtaining a masters and joining the private sector was my most likely plan. As I searched for graduate opportunities, one professor at UF encouraged me to apply to Kansas State University's agricultural economics program. Soon after, I was contacted by Dr. Barry Goodwin, about the possibility of visiting Manhattan, Kansas to learn more about their program, and about an opportunity called a National Needs Fellowship. Dr. Goodwin, who also was a recipient of the NNF program, showed me the many exciting opportunities in KSU's graduate program. I visited a number of institutions searching for graduate school, but when I went to Kansas State, I was overwhelmed with their support and the opportunities. It was not until I was presented with this opportunity that I decided to pursue a Ph.D. program, so I think it is fair to say, had it not been for the NNF, I would most

likely have stopped my education after a Masters degree and joined the private sector.

The level of support from the NNF program and Kansas State University allowed me to take advantage of many opportunities as a graduate student that I may have otherwise missed. For example, the Department assisted with travel cost for NNF students to attend the annual meetings of the American Agricultural Economics Association (AAEA). At these meetings, I met many future colleagues and made contacts that have helped shape my career.

After completing my Ph.D. under this program, I was offered faculty position at Mississippi State University. Though Dr. Goodwin had moved from Kansas State University while I was pursuing my studies, I have always valued his opinion, so I contacted him for help once again on this important decision. Dr. Goodwin was a graduate (M.S., 1984) from the program at Mississippi State and he encouraged me to start my career there. Once again, his advice was on target, as I was afforded many opportunities at this exciting department. In a smaller department environment, I taught classes, participated in university service, started a research program, and even served as graduate coordinator for the Master of Agribusiness program that had been started with the help of Dr. Goodwin's former major professor, Dr. Travis Phillips.

When I left the University of Florida in 1991 to pursue graduate studies, I was unsure where my career path would lead, but I did know I liked UF and Gainesville. In 2001, I was able to return to Gainesville and UF, where I am now a Full Professor in the same department I started my training.

Since graduation, I have worked with large numbers of undergraduate students, serving as Undergraduate Coordinator for the department that gave me my start. I have won the AAEA's Distinguished Teaching Award (for less than 10 years' experience) and UF's Advisor of the Year Award. I have directed the training of many graduate students, and in 2005, I received a grant allowing me to support four graduate students with National Needs Fellowships for their graduate studies.

I owe the USDA's National Needs Fellowship program for my professional success. The debt I owe is not just for the direct support, but I am evidence that the support of the NNF program leads to the development of future scientists. I know Dr. Barry Goodwin credits the NNF program for his success, and if not for him, I may have chosen a different graduate program, and may have stuck with my plan to stop after my M.S. degree. I am proud to be associated with this very important program.